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SOME ACCOUNT OF THE THIRTY-SEVEN NATS (ROYAL GHOSTS) OF THE BURMESE.

BY

COLONEL R. C. TEMPLE, C.I.E.

Twenty-two Nats on Eleven Plates in colours.

Peacock.

RAM SINGH DEL MAYO SCHOOL OF ART LAHORE

Published under the patronage of the Government of India.

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IRON WORK.

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W. GRIGGS,
HANOVER STREET, PECKHAM,
LONDON, S.E.

The Journal of Indian Art and Industry.

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE THIRTY-SEVEN NATS (ROYAL GHOSTS) OF THE BURMESE.

By R. C. Temple, C.I.E.

NO one can be long in Burma without hearing of the Thirty-seven Nats, and every book on the Burmese, from the writings of the most learned scholars and most competent observers to those of the butterflies of literature, who flutter through the country and write about it, contains more or less elaborate and more or less accurate notices of them, and still it has always been most difficult to say definitely what the word actually means or what the Nats are really supposed to be. Perhaps the most nebulous ideas of all on the subject are those of the persons who openly or secretly believe in them, and yet the Nats pervade all Burma and are in one form or another held in awe by all the native population, Burmese or otherwise by descent, whether Buddhist or Pantheistic by faith, whether civilised or savage, whether enlightened so far as Oriental wisdom can teach or entirely ignorant. The subject for study thus opened up is very wide, very complicated, and to the student of anthropology of some importance. I have in hand a book (to be largely illustrated in monochrome and colours by Messrs. Griggs from Burmese drawings, paintings and carvings in my possession) of the whole of the Thirty-seven Nats, but on the present occasion I shall confine myself to a brief exposition of the historical aspect of the subject and to a short explanation of the representation of twenty-two of the Nats, taken from a fine series of paintings contained in a *parabaik* or manuscript by an anonymous Burmese artist.

Speaking generally, the Nats are supernatural beings derived from three separate sources—the supernatural beings of the Buddhists, celestial, terrestrial and infernal, derived from the old Brahmanic cosmogony of India; the tutelary spirits that fill the Earth and all that is thereon, man himself and all the creatures, objects and places amongst which he lives and moves and has his being, derived from the ancient animistic pre-Buddhist beliefs of the people; and the ghosts and spirits of the departed. In such a hierarchy as this there are, as there plainly must be, many Orders, and the object of the present notes—the Order of the Thirty-seven Nats—belongs to the category of ghosts and spirits of departed heroes, except in one instance, the chief of the Order, Thagyá Nat, who springs from ancient Indian Brahmanic ideas.

Now not only are all the Thirty-seven Nats (excepting Thagyá Nat) ghosts of departed heroes, but they all, except one other, purport to be the spirits of persons either themselves royal, or directly or indirectly connected with royalty. The stories, as now commonly current, are also not necessarily fastened on to persons very long since dead. The majority of them were alive between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries of our era, and some less than two hundred years ago. One was well known to the early Portuguese settlers and was often mentioned in their accounts. Every Nat has his or her own cult, *i.e.*, an appropriate ceremony or festival, and an appropriate time and place for performing it, which is in every case of interest to the student; but just now I must confine myself to a historical notice.

The origin of the number thirty-seven may be taken to have arisen in this way. The most popular celestial being who interferes benevolently in the affairs of this Earth, in Burmese Buddhist idea, is Thagyá Nat, who, according to the orthodox Buddhist cosmogony, is the Lord of the Heaven of the Thirty-three, the Trayastrimça of Sanskrit and Tawatimsa of Pali. To these thirty-three Nats were dedicated thirty-seven popular hymns chaunted at the various festivals, and when the Burmese came to fastening these hymns on to the ghosts of their popular heroes they fixed the number of individuals at thirty-seven also. As the names of the majority of them will now come before the reader, I give here what a prolonged study of the subject induces me to call the Orthodox List. The qualifications for admission into the list are such as might be expected:—great prominence, strong personality or striking performances during life; or one of those sudden, cruel, startling deaths or tragic, terrifying fates only too common in Burman, as in all Oriental, history.

The Orthodox List of the Nats.

1. Thag[illegible]í Nat.
2. Mahágíri Nat.
3. Hnamádawgyí Nat.
4. Shwe Nabé Nat.
5. Thónban Hla Nat.
6. Taung-ngu Mingaung Nat.
7. Mintará Nat.
8. Thandawgán Nat.
9. Shwe Nawrathá Nat.
10. Aungzwámagyí Nat.
11. Ngázíshin Nat.
12. Aungbinlè Sinbyushin Nat.
13. Taungmagyí Nat.
14. Maung Minshin Nat.
15. Shindaw Nat.
16. Nyaung-gyin Nat.
17. Tabìn Shwédí Nat.
18. Minyè Aungdin Nat.
19. Shwe Sippin Nat.
20. Mèdaw Shwésagá Nat.
21. Maung Po Tu Nat.
22. Yun Bayìn Nat.
23. Maung Minbyú Nat.
24. Mándalé Bódaw Nat.
25. Shwébyin Naungdaw Nat.
26. Shwébyin Nyídaw Nat.
27. Minthá Maung Shin Nat.
28. Tíbyusaung Nat.
29. Tíbyusaung Mèdaw Nat.
30. Bayìnmáshin Mingaung Nat.
31. Min Síthú Nat.
32. Min Kyawzwá Nat.
33. Myaukpet Shinmá Nat.
34. Anauk Míbayá Nat.
35. Shingón Nat.
36. Shingwá Nat.
37. Shin-nèmí Nat.

The orthodox numbering has no reference to chronological order, but the stories do nevertheless refer to five distinct cycles of legends which are grouped round the popular stories of great historical personages of the remote and comparatively recent past alike. In each cycle or group the several stories are clearly connected and dependent on each other. The legends cover practically the whole of Burmese history. In order, therefore, to obtain anything approaching a clear understanding of the Nat stories and their sequence, it is necessary to be in possession of the outlines of the exceedingly complicated political history of Burma. To explain this it must be understood that there are three separate races which have had a hand in forming the dynasties connected with the Nat stories—the Burmans, the Shans and the Talaings, who have all been mixed up together, dynastically speaking, and have constantly ousted each other as ruling races for a time in practically all parts of the country. Very briefly and roughly the story in outline is this, so far as the Nat stories are concerned. There were legendary Burman kings at Tagaung, followed by a connected Burman dynasty at Prome and then Pagàn, from 483 B.C. to 1298 A.D., followed in its turn by two contemporary Shan lines at Pinyá and Sagaing up to 1364. With the last two was a contemporary Burman line at Tonghoo from 1313 to 1450, which at that date became absorbed into the Burman dynasty of Pegu. The Shan lines of Pinyá and Sagaing became merged in the Burman line of Ava, which was upset by the Burman dynasty of Pegu in 1551. This then became a general dynasty of Pegu and Ava from 1581 to 1751, giving way to a Shan dynasty of Pegu, which was soon conquered by the last Burman dynasty of Alompra, lasting from 1757 to 1885. There was also a Talaing dynasty of Thaton and Pegu from 573 to 1050, when the country became tributary to the Burmese Pagàn dynasty till 1287, when a Shan dynasty was set up at Pegu till it was ousted by the Burman Tonghoo line in 1540. Pegu then became merged in the Burmese Ava dynasty till 1740, when for 17 years a second Shan line was established there, finally giving place to the Alompra dynasty in 1757.

With this much information at his disposal I trust that the reader will be able to follow the grouping of the legends. The first group, which may be called the Duttabaung Cycle, relates to the old legendary Burman dynasty of Tagaung and Prome, and centres about that old-world hero of Burma, King Duttabaung of Prome, ostensibly carrying us back to the days about the foundation of the Buddhist era in the VIth century B.C. The second group, or the Anawratházaw Cycle, purports to relate to the immediate surroundings of the conqueror Anawratházaw of Pagàn in the XIth century A.D., but in reality it wanders about in a confused kind of way amongst his immediate predecessors and descendants. The third group, or the mixed Ava Mingaung and Pagàn Alaungsíthu Cycle, is meant to relate to the Burman dynasty of Ava (1364-1551) in the XVth century. But the stories have become so confused in their references as to relate equally to the days of Alaungsíthu of Pagàn, a great name in Burmese history, and his successors of the XIIth and XIIIth centuries; to the much earlier kings of Pagàn of the VIIIth century; and to the Shans of Pinyá in the XVth century. The fourth group, or the Tabìn Shwédí Cycle, relates to the great Tabìn Shwédi himself of Tonghoo and Pegu, and the contemporary subordinate dynasty of Prome in the XVIth century. The fifth group, or the Bayìn Naung Cycle, relates to even later dates connected with the Bayìn Naung of Pegu and Ava and his successors of the Ava-Pegu dynasty (1581-1751) in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries.

I would draw special attention to the exceedingly modern nature of many of these stories. The centuries B.C. and the VIIIth and even XIth centuries A.D. might be legitimate dates for legendary stories of spirits; but the bulk of these tales belong to the period contained between the XIIth and XVIIth centuries A.D., so late a date as 1558 being well authenticated for one story, and the still later date of about 1620 being hardly doubtful for another. Even so recent a conqueror as Tabìn Shwédí, reigning from 1530 to 1550, during the reign of our own King Henry VIIIth, and well known to the earlier European settlers in Pegu, who actually fought for and against him in considerable numbers, is himself a prominent Nat.

The illustrations published in this number of the *Journal of Indian Art* well illustrate Groups I., IV. and V., fairly illustrate Group III., and hardly touch the interesting legends connected with the greatest hero in Burmese history, Anawratházaw. The legend of each group—not the history, be it remembered—in its main features is as follows:—

Group I. consists of seven Nats with a truly folklore story connected with the early hero, King Duttabaung of Prome. Nga Tindè, the Burmese Samson, a blacksmith by trade, was treacherously burnt alive by the King of Tagaung, who had married his sister, Ma Sawmè. She thereupon burnt herself with her brother. Nga Tindè married the daughter of the sea-serpent (*yênagá*) and by her he had two sons, who grew up out of two eggs, and were killed in a boxing match ordered by King Duttabaung of Prome. King Duttabaung had a wife of great beauty, whom, owing to a calumny, he neglected and forced to earn her living as a weaver; but he nevertheless had a daughter by her, who died with her mother. The illustrations of this legend are of the following Nats:—No. 2, Mahágíri Nat, who is Nga Tindè himself, usually represented in Court dress standing, supported

by three *balús*, or ogres, on a kneeling elephant. No. 3, Hnamádawgyi Nat, who was Nga Tindè's sister. She is usually represented as a woman standing in Court dress of a high class, supported by a *balú* on a kneeling elephant. No. 4, Shwe Nabè Nat, the daughter of the sea-serpent and wife of Nga Tindè, usually represented as a girl standing in Court dress of a high class. No. 5, Thónban Hla Nat, King Duttabaung's neglected wife, who is usually represented as a girl standing in the Court dress of a royal attendant, supported by a Burmanised representation of the Brahmanic elephant-headed god Ganéça, thus showing the Indian origin of the cult. Nos. 13 and 14, Taungmagyí Nat and Maung Minshin Nat, who were the two boys born from the eggs brought forth by Nga Tindè's serpent wife. This pair is usually represented as a couple of six-armed soldiers standing in Court costume. The arms in each case hold a quoit, a *dah* or sword, and a couple of spears. The six arms plainly show the Indian origin of this cult also.

Group II. consists of nine Nats, who purport to centre round the great conqueror Anawratházaw of Pagàn. The outline of this group of legends is as follows:—King Kyaungbyu Min of Pagàn had three sons—two by one queen named Kyizo and Súkadé, who deposed their father, and a third younger one, Anawratházaw, who became the great conqueror, by another queen. Kyizo succeeded first and was accidentally killed; aud afterwards Súkadé was dethroned and slain by Anawratházaw. Anawratházaw had in his service two brothers named the elder and the younger Shwébyin, natives of India, whom he sent to fetch a holy tooth-relic from China, but slew on their return for resisting his orders. They had a guardian, who was a Brahman and Minister of the King, with the title of the Mándalé Bódaw. He and his sister were slain at the same time as the brothers. Historically the story of the Mándalé Bódaw and the two Shwébyin relates probably to the much later tale respecting King Narathu, better known as Kalákyá Min, or the king killed by the foreigners, the splendid tragedy of which the Burmese legend makers have altogether missed. Among other legends of the time of Anawratházaw is that which tells of the capture and exile of King Manuhá of Thatón. He and all his family were turned into pagoda slaves, in which condition of hopeless degradation one of the princes died of leprosy at Pagàn. The illustrations of this legend are wanting, except in the solitary instance of the unfortunate Prince of Thatón, who is usually represented as a leper in high-class Court dress leaning on a staff. He is generally shown without either fingers or toes and with his face marked with the usual signs of tubercular leprosy.

Group III. consists of eleven Nats, whose story centres round the two kings of the Ava dynasty of the XVth century named Mingaung, a common Burmese royal title, or round the great hero Alaungsíthu of Pagàn, whose long reign covered parts of the XIth and XIIth centuries, or round King Thenzwin of Pagàn of the VIIIth century, according as we take the central heroine to be the wife of one or other of the above kings. We only know her by her title of Anauk Míbayá, the Northern Queen, which belongs to one of the consorts of every Burmese monarch. The illustrations are of heroes belonging to all the groups. No. 7, Mintará Nat, is said to have been the elder brother of the first Mingaung of Ava and to have died of fever. He is usually represented as seated in full Court costume, and winged after the Yodayá (*i.e.*, Siamese) fashion. No. 9, Shwe Nawrathá Nat, is said to have been the grandson of the second Mingaung of Ava and to have been thrown into the Irrawaddy for rebellion and thus drowned. He is usually represented in high-class Court costume, seated as a Manipuri with polo mallet and ball. The modern English game of polo came from the Manipuris through English officers in quite recent times. No. 10, Aungzwámagyí Nat belongs to the period of Alaungsíthu, with a legend of characteristic royal treachery. He is represented usually as a young man in high-class Court costume, riding. No. 11, Ngázíshin Nat, Lord of the Five White Elephants, is described as belonging to the Shan dynasty of Pinyà by a confusion in the popular mind of the Shans of Pinyà with the Burmans of Ava of about the same time. He is represented as a royal figure seated on an elephant with five heads, in all the panoply of royalty that can be piled on to a Burmese king, in token of his claim to descent from all the royal lines then existing. No. 12, Aungbinlè Sinbyushin Nat, is Thíháthu, son of the first Mingaung of Ava, and is usually represented as standing in Court dress, supported on a three-headed elephant, in token of his royalty, no doubt. No. 19, Shwe Sippin Nat, belongs to the Thenzwin legends of Pagàn of the VIIIth century. His title was the Hlaingdet Myoza, and he was put to death by having his legs buried in the earth and being left to die in that position. He is usually represented as seated in high-class Court costume with an uplifted sword. No. 20, Mèdaw Shwésagá Nat, was the mother of the Hlaingdet Myoza and died of grief at the terrible fate of her son. She is usually represented as a girl kneeling in full Court dress, with her elbows turned outwards after the fashion of Burmese belles of the upper classes. No. 21, Maung Po Tu Nat is generally relegated to the time of the Shan dynasty of Pinyà, and is described as a trader who was taken by a tiger. He is usually represented as a very high official seated on what may pass for a tiger.

Group IV. consists of four Nats, purporting to be connected with the conqueror King Tabìn Shwédí of Tonghoo and his surroundings. He was the founder of the great Burman dynasty of Pegu in the XVIth

century. The illustrations of this legend are as follows :—No. 6, Taung-ngu Mingaung Nat is said to be in the story a King of Tonghoo who died of dysentery. He was in reality a subordinate King of Prome put to death by Tabìn Shwédí under circumstances of atrocious cruelty. He is usually represented as seated in high-class Court dress. No. 8, Thandawgán Nat, was the secretary of the last and died from snakebite while plucking jasmines for the king. He is usually represented in the dress of a Court official. No. 17, Tabìn Shwédí Nat, is, as his name implies, the great Tabìn Shwédí himself, usually represented as seated merely in high-class Court dress.

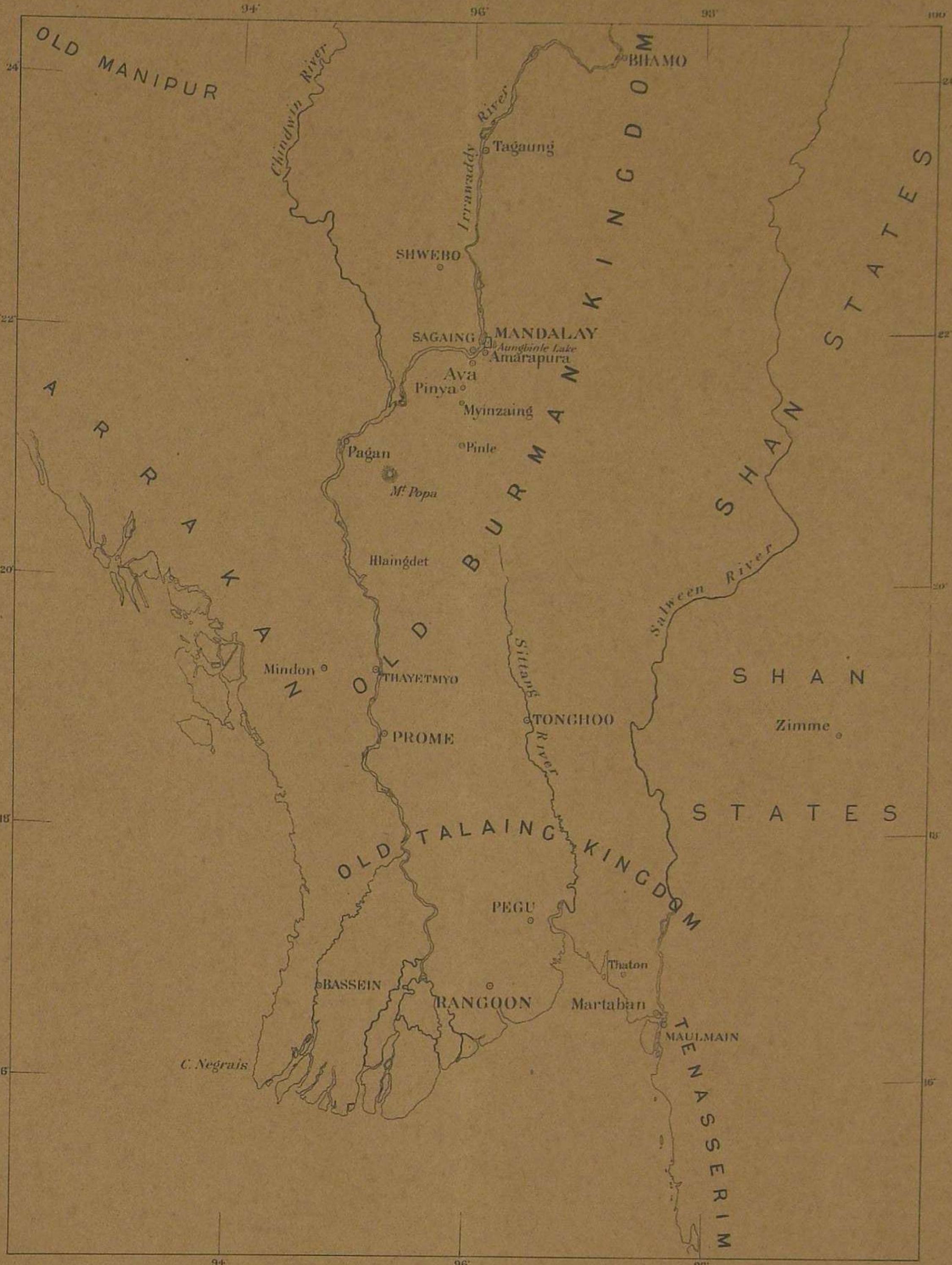
Group V. consists of four Nats of a very late date connected with the conqueror Bayìn Naung of Pegu, the Branginoco of the Portuguese writers, and his Ava-Pegu dynasty of the XVIIth century. The illustrations relate to No. 15, Shindaw Nat, a young Prince of Ava who died of snakebite while still a novice in the Hnat-pyittaung Monastery. He is usually represented in the costume of a novice telling his beads. No. 18, Minyè Aungdin Nat, a son of Anaukthalón Mintarágyi of Ava, who died of drink about 1620 A.D. He is usually represented as a young man seated in high-class Court dress, playing on the Burmese harp. No. 22, Yun Bayìn Nat, was the Chief of Zimmè, who was made a prisoner by Bayìn Naung of Pegu and died at Rangoon in 1558 A.D. He is usually represented seated in high-class costume, and in this case we have a clear reference to an actual historical expedition undertaken by Bayìn Naung in search of white elephants, in which his greatest opponents were the Yun Shans of Zimmè.

There is only one more illustration to explain—that of No. 1, Thagyá Nat himself, who is the prince of all the Nats, of whatever nature or degree, by the common acceptation of all Burmans: the No. 1 of all lists. The antiquity of his cult is indicated by his name, Thagyá, which represents the Sanskrit word Çakra, thus throwing the date of the cult back to the early times before the present Southern Buddhist (Pali) form of Buddhism prevailed in Burma and the old debased Northern (Sanskrit) form was current. The Çakra of the Indian Buddhism was the ancient god Indra of the Brahmans, the Lord of the Firmament, turned by the Buddhists into the lowest of the three great rulers of the heavens they set up on adapting the old Brahmanic cosmogony to their reformed ideas. The other two were Mahábrahmá and Mára, the Byammá Nat and Mán Nat of the Burmese. All three, both in Indian and modern Burmese ideas, descend when necessary to the earth to interfere in the affairs of men; Mahábrahmá and Çakra beneficially and Mára adversely. In the Burma of to-day Çakra as Thagyá is the Nat who most frequently does so, and he is consequently their Lord of Life, their Recording Angel, the supernatural being most reverenced and most respected. At the commencement of the New Year, he visits the earth for three days for the general good ; and I well recollect that in the afternoon of the most important of these three days at the beginning of the Burmese year 1250 (April, 1888), there was a sudden and vivid flash of lightning, followed by crashing thunder, which gave great satisfaction to the people of the royal city of Mandalay, because it was positive evidence to them of the presence among them of Thagyá himself in the days of their adversity—a notion having its roots in the very foundations of Indian belief. Thagyá is usually represented in all his royalty, seated on the elephant Eyáwun, on whose august back he makes his annual visit to the earth. He bears a fan in his hand, and before him is his driver, and behind him a faithful guardian *balú*.

With this recollection I close this preliminary and incomplete incursion into the realm of the Thirty-seven Nats.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

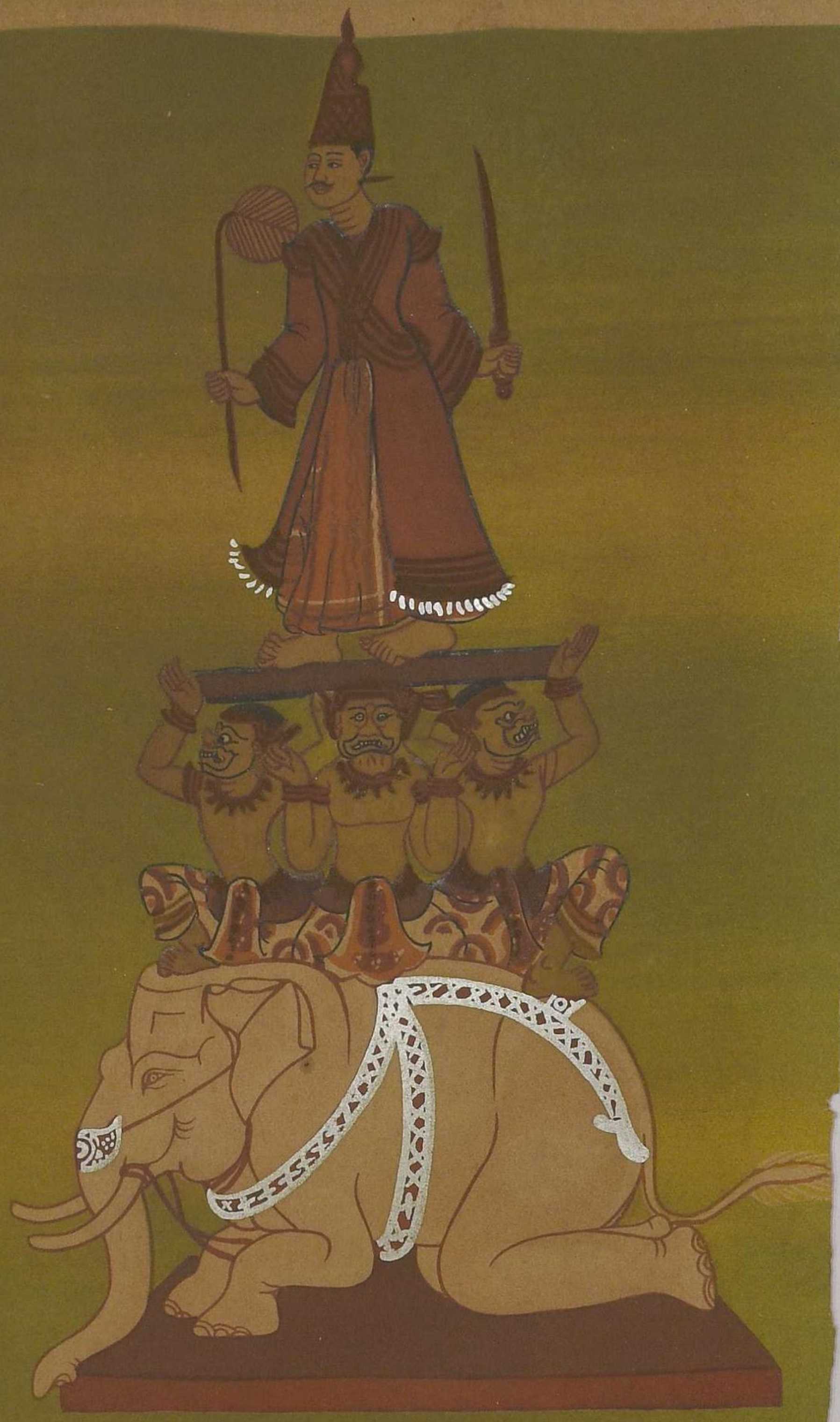
Twenty-two Nats (Royal Ghosts) of the Burmese on eleven plates in colours (Nos. 1-22). 23.—Peacock in gold and silver spangles.



OLD MANIPUR
Chindwin River
Irrawaddy River
BHAMO
Tagaung
OLD BURMAN KINGDOM
SHAN STATES
SHWEBO
SAGAING
MANDALAY
Aungbinle Lake
Amarapura
Ava
Pinya
Myinzaing
Pinle
Pagan
Mt Popa
ARRAKAN
Hlaingdet
Salween River
Mindon
THAYETMYO
Sittang River
TONGHOO
PROME
SHAN
Zimme
STATES
OLD TALAING KINGDOM
PEGU
Thaton
BASSEIN
RANGOON
Martaban
MAULMAIN
TENASSERIM
C. Negrais
94°
96°
98°
100
24°
22°
20°
18°
16°

23. Peacock in Gold and Silver Spangles raised on Cloth, made at Kemendine near Rangoon.

1. Thagyá Nat.



2. Mahágirí Nat.

3. Hnamádawgyí Nat.

4. Shwe

Thónban Hla Nat.

6. Taung-ngu Mingaung Nat.

7. Mintará Nat.

8. Thandawgán Nat.

9. Shwe Nawrathá Nat.

10. Aungzwámagyí Nat.

11. Ngázíshin Nat.

12. Aungbinlè Sinbyushin Nat.

13. Taungmagyí Nat.

14. Maung Minshin Nat.

15. Shindaw Nat.

16. Nyaung-gyin Nat.

17. Tabin Shwédi Nat.

18. Minyé Aungdin Nat.

19. Shwe Sippin Nat.

20. Mèdaw Shwésagá Nat.

21. Maung Po Tu Nat.

22. Yun Bayin Nat.

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ALBUM OF JACOBE,

Master Workman at the Armoury, Greenwich

1590.

It is proposed to publish in facsimile the above-mentioned work as a valuable record of the Armourer's art as practised in England in the second half of the sixteenth century.

The Album contains drawings in ink and colours of suits of armour made by this master for several of the most famous courtiers and soldiers of the reign of Elizabeth.

Amongst these are suits for the Dukes of Finland and Norfolk; the Earls of Leicester, Sussex, Worcester, &c.; Lord Scrope; Sir John Smith, Sir Henry Lee, Sir C. Hatton, &c.

Special interest attaches to this MS., as it formerly belonged to the Harleian Library, and of the suits of armour therein figured some of the finest are still in existence. Of these the following may be mentioned:—Earl of Pembroke, K.G., now at Wilton; George, Earl of Cumberland, at Hothfield; Sir Christopher Hatton, sold last year from the Spitzer collection for £2080; Sir Henry Lee, K.G., Master of the Armoury to Queen Elizabeth and James I., now in the hall of the Armourers' and Braziers' Company; the Earl of Worcester, in the Tower of London.

Although armour in England was, at the time referred to, fast disappearing from use, the suits shown in the work were all of a high class of workmanship and remarkable for their excellence, no less than interesting as the personal and intimate panoply of some of the brightest stars of the golden age of Elizabeth.

It is hoped that the publication of this unique MS. may lead to the identification of other suits and portions of armour still scattered through the country, and as yet not correctly connected with famous names in English history.

The reproductions will be accompanied by a short note on the MS. and brief notices of the individuals for whom the suits were made.

500 PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE ANCIENT MONUMENTS, TEMPLES, AND SCULPTURES OF INDIA.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA IN COUNCIL granted permission to use the very large collection of photographic negatives of Ancient Buildings, Sculptures, &c., from all parts of India, now in the possession of the India Office. These illustrate very fully the history and development of the various styles of Indian Architecture from the earliest times, in Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jaina Caves to Dravidian, Chalukyan, Indo-Aryan, and Saracenic temples, mosques, and other buildings. They constitute an indispensable series of illustrations of the art, history and mythology of India, and are of the very highest importance and interest to Orientalists, Artists and others, in University and Art Libraries, Oriental Institutes, &c.

These Indian archæological photographs are regarded by experts who have seen them to be so important for the study of Oriental Art and History that the present work was undertaken to supply a felt want. It is to consist of three portfolios, and is published by subscription.

After the work was commenced, it was found that a large and important collection of photographs in the Imperial Museum at Calcutta was also available, but their introduction has caused delay in issuing the first part. Parts II and III will follow in rapid succession, as the plates have been very nearly all selected and printed.

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